

Past is Prologue

by Brandon

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>SUMMARY: An encounter with two strangers changes Dana Scully's life forever.
NOTE: Yup. In 1980 HILL STREET BLUES was on Thursday nights, not Friday nights. Sue me. Er, no, wait...heh heh.

> <p>Past is Prologue<p>

by Brandon D. Ray (publius@avalon.net)

> <p>

Baltimore, MD

>July 11, 1980, 9:43 p.m.<p>

Dana Scully was bored and lonely. She was bored because she was penned up at home with nothing to do. She was lonely because there was no one there to not do it with. With whom not to do it,>>she amended self-consciously.

"Remember, I'm trusting you, Dana," her brother Bill had told her before going out for the evening. "I don't want you going out with your friends tonight, and I don't want you having anyone over here while I'm not home. Do you hear me?"

To add insult to injury, he'd even alluded to that unfortunate incident with Reggie de Wahl last week, which was totally unfair. She'd dealt with Reggie, hadn't she? Didn't that PROVE that she could

be trusted?

For the thousandth time since June, Dana wondered what had possessed her parents to leave Bill in charge of her for the summer while they were in Europe. What have I ever done to deserve this? They must hate me; that's all. They must just totally hate me.>>

"It's not like I can't take care of myself," she told the living room, which had the good sense not to answer back. "After all, I AM sixteen years old."

For all the good it did her.

With a sigh of exasperation, she got up from the sofa and went to the window. Outside, rain was coming down in torrents, punctuated at frequent intervals by lightning and thunder. It was definitely a good night to be indoors. Of course, that didn't make her one bit less mad at Bill.

She went over to the television and clicked it on, trying each of the channels in turn. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. She left the last channel on, on the theory that ANYTHING was better than all this silence, and flung herself back down on the sofa again.

It wasn't very long before she was having serious second thoughts about the television program. Maybe the silence WAS better, after all. She was about to get up and turn the set off again when the phone rang.

Dana sprang to her feet. Maybe it was Charlene or Betty, calling to report on their dates. It was early for that, but not impossible. Pretty pathetic, Dana,>> she thought as she reached for the phone. Can't get a date on a Friday night, so you're living off of your friends' stories.>> Not that Bill was likely to let her go out, even if she HAD a date.

"Scully residence."

"Dana, this is Bill." Oh great. Dana rolled her eyes at the sound of her brother's voice.

"Hi, Bill," she said, putting far more enthusiasm into her voice than she really felt.

"Dana, the storm's getting pretty bad, so I've decided not to risk driving home tonight. I'll be staying overnight with a friend, but I should be home tomorrow morning. Do you think you can manage on your own that long?"

No, Bill,>> she thought, rolling her eyes again. I can't imagine how I'll cope for twelve whole hours without your wonderful presence.>> Aloud, she said, "Oh, sure. I'll be fine." In the background she heard a woman's voice. Tara,>> she thought in disgust. Bill, you aren't fooling anyone.>>

"Okay, Dana," Bill said. "Be sure you get to bed at a reasonable hour. And don't forget to brush your teeth." Again she heard Tara's voice in the background.

"Okay."

"I'm trusting you, Dana. Have a good evening."

Gosh. You're trusting me. That means so much.>> "I will."

"See you in the morning." And he hung up.

With a sigh, she hung up the telephone. Trust Bill to make her feel like she was eight years old again. How typical. The only good thing about the conversation was the news that he wouldn't be home tonight. Twelve glorious hours without his overbearing presence. Twelve hours when she could do anything she wanted to do.

If only there were something she wanted to do.

On the television, the previous program had ended, and now HILL STREET BLUES was playing. Dana stretched out on the couch and watched for a while. She kind of liked this program; it felt more real than most of the other cop shows. Idly, she wondered what it would be like to be a police officer. Probably really, really boring. Lots of paperwork. Lots of rules to follow. Probably nothing like the TV shows -- even HILL STREET BLUES.

Here came her favorite part. Frank Furillo and Joyce Davenport were having a love affair, but they couldn't let anyone find out, because they were afraid it would affect their professional relationship. Dana thought that was really silly. If two people were in love, they shouldn't be afraid of anything. If *I* had someone as sexy as Frank Furillo, I'd be shouting it from the rooftops!>>

On the flickering screen, Frank and Joyce were taking a bath together. No way Bill would EVER let her watch something like this. Fortunately, he wasn't here -- he was probably doing something very much like this with Tara, at this very moment. Hypocrite. Here it comes,>> she thought. Frank and Joyce were about to kiss...

There was a tremendous flash of lightning, and the power went out.

With a moan of frustration, Dana threw one of the sofa cushions in the direction of the television. In the sudden darkness, she couldn't tell whether she hit anything or not, and that just made her madder. Dammit! I finally find SOMETHING to occupy my time, and now THIS has to happen!>>

She lay on the sofa seething for a few minutes, wondering if the power was going to come back. If it wasn't she should probably go look for some candles. Or not. BILL might not like it. "Now Dana," she said, mimicking her brother's voice. "I don't want you playing with matches while I'm not home. I'm TRUSTING you, Dana." Then, with self-conscious deliberation, she added, "Fuck!"

There was a knock on the door.

Dana started guiltily, and sat up and looked at the door. Maybe it had been her imagination. The sound hadn't been very loud. It might just have been the wind, or a tree branch.

The knock was repeated, more insistently this time. Dana looked at the

door uneasily. Should she answer it? Who could it beat this hour? It could be anyone. Bill wouldn't want me to answer it,>> she thought.

That did it. Jumping to her feet, she walked briskly to the door and pulled it open. Her eyes widened at what she saw.

Two people stood in the doorway, a man and a woman. Their features were lost in shadows, but Dana was instinctively sure that she had never seen either of them before. They were both wearing trench coats, and they were both drenched from head to foot.

A flash of lightning illuminated the man's face. Dana had a momentary impression of a strong chin, a slightly too-big nose, and eyes. Beautiful, gorgeous, eyes. She felt herself drawn to him, as if there were some physical connection between them, and even as the momentary flash of light faded, she could feel those eyes looking back at her. She shivered slightly.

Suddenly he swayed, and started to topple towards her. Instinctively, she took a step back, and the woman standing next to him stepped forward, wrapping her arms around the man's chest and easing him forward into the room and down to the floor. "Easy, Mulder," the woman murmured. "Take it easy. We're safe now, but you have to stay with me, just a few more minutes." Her voice was maddeningly familiar, but Dana couldn't quite place it.

The shadowy couple was now kneeling on the floor just inside the front door, the woman supporting the man, helping him to remain upright. Outside, the rain continued unabated, with frequent flashes of lightning illuminating the landscape.

A sudden gust of wind blew a gout of rain in through the doorway, dragging Dana back to reality. Hurriedly, she stepped forward and shut the door, then turned to look at the strangers again.

"C'mon, Mulder," the woman was saying quietly. "Work with me here. It's just a few more steps, but I can't carry you."

"S-sorry." The voice was so low, Dana could barely hear it. "I don't think I can. I'm so tired, Scully."

Scully?>> Dana thought. What the hell?>>

Dana's eyes had been gradually adjusting to the dark; now she caught a flash of red hair as the woman turned and looked back over her shoulder. "Dana," she said. "You've got to help me. Just help me get him over to the couch."

She knows my name?>> Dana's confusion deepened. Who WERE these people, and what, exactly, had she gotten herself into by letting them into the house? She shook her head. The man was obviously in no shape to do anyone any harm, and the woman seemed to be totally focused on taking care of the man. If they were here to rob the house or something, they were certainly taking a round about way to do it.

"Dana!" the woman repeated sharply. "I know you must be scared and confused, but right now I need your help. I can't do this alone."

Blinking, Dana took a step forward. "What should I do?"

"Get down and take his other side," the woman said. She waited while Dana dropped to her knees and awkwardly pulled the man's left arm around her shoulders. She felt his fingers lightly grip her shoulder, and she shivered again. There was something about his touch....

"Okay," the woman said, "now get your arms around his waist, as best you can... That's good." She spoke to the man again. Mulder. That was his name. "Okay, Mulder," the woman said. "We're going to lift you and walk you over to the sofa. It's only a few steps; I know you can do it." To Dana: "Dana, I'm going to count three, and then we lift him. Try not to use your back; you could hurt yourself. Push with your knees. Ready?"

"Yes."

"Okay. One. Two. Three."

A moment later the two women were easing the man down onto the sofa. Dana had an inexplicable feeling of loss as his arm slipped down off her shoulder and dropped to the floor. Automatically, she reached down and grasped his hand, intending to tuck his arm up on the sofa next to him.

Again, there was the sense of connection, as if an electrical circuit had been completed. Dana was frozen in place, paralyzed by the sensations racing along her arm and down her spine. This was... this was... spellbinding. It was the only word for it. She'd never felt anything like it in her life. His hand was large, fleshy and warm, and lightly callused on the fingertips. She closed her eyes for a moment, trying just to feel his hand, exploring his knuckles with her thumb, brushing her fingertips against his palm. Shutting everything else out.

"Scully."

She opened her eyes again. The man was looking directly at her; she could tell, even in the gloom. As had happened in the doorway a few moments ago, she could feel his gaze on her, penetrating the darkness. Looking at her. She was completely caught up in the intensity of the moment, and suddenly she wondered if this was what sex was like.

"I'm here, Mulder."

The woman's voice snapped Dana out of her trance. Hastily, she dropped the man's hand, stood up, and backed away. The other woman knelt down in her place.

"Scully?" The man's voice sounded confused now. Dana thought she saw his head tilt, and she had the impression that he was looking back and forth between her and the woman kneeling at his side.

"Shh. It's okay, Mulder. Try to relax."

Dana had to say something; she had to do something. This was too weird, and she had to try to regain control. "A-ambulance," she

stuttered. "I should call for an ambulance." And she took a hesitant step towardsthe telephone.

The other woman's hand on her wrist stopped her as she was about to lift the receiver from its cradle. "No, Dana." The voice was soft and reassuring, but also firm. "No ambulance. He's just tired; he needs to rest for awhile."

Dana turned to face the other woman. She peered through the darkness, trying to make out the woman's features, but there just wasn't enough light. The woman was about Dana's height and build, and had the same fiery red hair, but beyond that she was a featureless shadow.

Then the lights came back on, and Dana gasped.

It was herself.

#

10:48 p.m.

"But I don't understand!" Dana said, for at least the tenth time in the past twenty minutes. She and the other woman -- Katherine, she had said to call her Katherine -- were sitting on the floor at the foot of the sofa, talking quietly while Fox Mulder slept, covered by a light blanket. Across the room, the TV chattered quietly to itself; it hadn't seemed important enough to walk over there and turn it off.

Dana had other things on her mind.

"I don't really understand, either," Katherine said, shaking her head. "Everything I know about physics says that it's impossible -- time travel, I mean. It violates the laws of thermodynamics, it violates the prohibition against simultaneity....it's just plain impossible." She paused, then added, "But it happened. We're here."

"But I still don't understand HOW it happened," Dana persisted. She glanced up at the man sleeping on the sofa, then looked back at Katherine. "Or why you came HERE." Dana was a little amazed at herself, at how easily she was accepting all of this. Perhaps it was the woman's presence, the woman who was so obviously a somewhat older version of herself. Still, Dana had a lot of questions, and she was determined to get answers to them.

"The second question is pretty easy," Katherine said with a little laugh. "We had nowhere else to go. Mulder hasn't slept in three days, we were caught out in the storm, our money's no good, and neither are our credit cards...." Her voice trailed off and she shrugged helplessly. "We had nowhere else to go."

"But HOW?" Dana said.

"That's a complicated question," Katherine replied. She paused for a moment, then went on, "I don't want to say too much. There could be serious repercussions." She shook her head in apparent frustration. "God, this is nuts." She paused again, and Dana sat quietly, waiting for her to continue. Finally: "It was an accident. We were

investigating some...irregularities in the workings of a researchlab. Mulder thought they might be connected to -- well, never mindthat part; it isn't important. The short version is that things gotout of hand, there was some shooting, then a tremendous flash of light...and here we are."

"That doesn't really answer my question," Dana said.

Katherine sighed. "I know. I'm sorry. There's a limitto how much I can tell you -- partly because I really don't understandmuch myself, but also because..." Her voice trailed off.

"Because you don't want me to know too much," Dana finished for her.

Katherine nodded, and smiled. "I guess so. It sounds corny,like something out of a cheap science fiction novel, but you're right. I don't dare let you find out too much; there's no telling what impactit might have on the future." She sighed again and shook her head. "This whole thing is supposed to be impossible, but it happened. We're here."

"You should have listened to me, Scully."

At the sound of Mulder's voice, Dana and Katherine both turned to lookat him. He was struggling to get up, but he was obviously very weak,and was having a hard time of it. Katherine climbed to her feet andmoved quickly to the end of the sofa, where she knelt down and gently tookhold of his shoulders and tried to get him to lie down again.

"Take it easy, Mulder," she said. "You need to rest. You'vebeen through a lot, the last few days."

"So have you," he pointed out.

"That's true, but I got more sleep than you did. Which is to say,I got some." She smiled fondly at him, and Dana felt an inexplicabletwinge of jealousy. It had been immediately obvious to her that thesetwo meant something to each other, but she didn't have the slightest cluewhy that should bother her. "Come on, Mulder," Katherine went on. "Trust me on this. You need to rest."

The appeal for trust seemed to do the trick, and the man relaxed andallowed her to lay his head back down on the pillow. She brusheda lock of hair off of his forehead and then pulled the blanket back uparound his shoulders.

"Aren't you going to give me a good night kiss, Scully?" he asked, alittle glint in his eyes.

Katherine smiled. "In your dreams, Mulder."

"That sounds like a good place," he replied, and closed his eyes. Katherine stayed next to him a moment longer, then rose to her feet andmoved back to sit next to Dana again.

"I probably should have listened to him," Katherine said, picking upthe conversation again. "As it turns out, he was right for once. And I have to admit that we had even encountered something that

looked like it might have been time travel once before." She shook her head. "But it's so hard to credit, and I just couldn't take it seriously. Sometimes it's almost too easy to retreat behind a wall of rationality."

Dana was starting to feel a little overwhelmed. Time travel. And not the first time they had encountered it. And those vague references to "irregularities"...it all seemed very dark and mysterious, and Katherine's reluctance to reveal anything of real substance was just making it worse. Dana had to know more; she had to understand what was going on.

"Who are you people?" she asked.

Katherine looked surprised. "I thought we already covered that," she replied. "I'm you. Your future self." She inclined her head towards the man on the sofa. "And this is my partner, Fox Mulder."

"I don't mean just that," Dana said. "I know your names. But I don't know anything about YOU. I don't know who you are, or what you do. You talk about investigating things; you mention that this isn't your first experience with, with time travel." She licked her lips, and suddenly felt very nervous at what had just popped into her head, but she had to say it. "You call him your partner, but you act like he's your lover, and if you really ARE me, then that means someday he'll be MY lover, and, and...." Dana heard her own voice trail off, and she dropped her eyes to stare at her hands clutched tightly together in her lap.

There was a moment or two of silence, then: "Dana." Dana didn't move, didn't speak, but just kept staring at her own hands. She couldn't believe she'd just said that. She wasn't in the habit of confronting adults in the first place, and then to find herself spilling such...intimate thoughts, and to a total stranger, no less.

Except that Katherine wasn't a stranger. At least, not exactly.

"Dana." She felt a featherlight touch on her shoulder. Steeling herself, she raised her eyes to look at the other woman.

"Sorry," Dana said. "I shouldn't have said that. I...I..."

Katherine shook her head. "No, it's okay, Dana. You had a perfect right. You're me after all, and if you don't have the right to ask yourself questions, who DO you have the right to ask?" She smiled slightly. "You've also had a load of bricks dropped on you in the past hour, and you're probably scared and confused. And as for...the other...well, you're not the first person who has jumped to that conclusion."

Dana felt irrationally pleased that Katherine seemed to be nearly as uncomfortable with the subject as she herself was. "You mean...you're not..."

Katherine shook her head, and took a deep breath. "No. No, we're not lovers. There was a time when I thought...never mind. It's not important."

"But why not?"

"Why isn't it important?" Katherine looked puzzled.

"No. I mean, why haven't you...you know." Dana blushed as she realized what she had just asked. She was usually so controlled, so disciplined in what she said and did. But tonight, talking to Katherine, it seemed as if all her usual barriers were down, and she was saying whatever came into her mind. It was weird, scary.

Exhilarating.

Katherine nodded slowly. "I guess that's a fair question," she said, then fell silent. "Unfortunately, I don't know that I can answer it. It's very complicated." She seemed to stop and think for a minute. Then: "There's been so much going on in our lives, so many...distractions, so many competing priorities..." She shrugged helplessly. "I guess it was never quite the right time."

For just an instant something sad seemed to emerge in Katherine's eyes, but it was gone so quickly that Dana couldn't be sure that she had really seen it, and then her older self was smiling at her. "In any case, it's not something you need to worry about. You've got twelve years before it will even become an issue for you, and then you can decide for yourself."

Dana raised her eyebrows. Keeping her voice carefully neutral, she said, "So I meet him in 1992?"

Katherine stared at her for a moment. Finally: "I shouldn't have said that."

"Why not?" Dana asked. "What harm can it do?"

The other woman shook her head. "I don't know -- and that's why I shouldn't have said that. Because I DON'T know." She almost seemed to be talking to herself. "I mean, what if that knowledge causes you to change your career track? What if you never go to medical school? What if you never join the Bureau --" She cut herself off, and shook her head again, a look of disbelief on her face. "Jesus; I'm babbling." She looked at Dana again. "Dana, this is really, really dangerous. I don't know what's going on between us, but I can't seem to stop it. But I've got to. I've got to."

"Jesus!"

Again, both women turned to look at the man lying on the couch. Once more he was struggling to sit up, and again Katherine jumped to her feet and tried to get him to lie down. But this time he pushed her away, and after a moment Dana realized that he was staring at the television screen. She turned to see what had attracted his attention.

HILL STREET BLUES had ended, and now the late news was on. The screen showed a man in a suit standing behind a podium, addressing an auditorium full of people. After a few seconds, Dana recognized him: Raymond Shaw. Bill's favorite presidential candidate. She made a face. Politics.

"Turn up the sound!"

Dana looked around at Mulder, surprised at the sharpness of his tone. He seemed to be completely focused on the television image, and was paying no attention to Katherine's attempts to get him to lie back down.

"I said turn up the volume!"

Dana jumped slightly, then hurriedly climbed to her feet and crossed to the television.

-- was Senator Raymond Shaw, the apparent Republican presidential nominee, addressing the Washington press corps at the National Press Club this afternoon. Mr. Shaw will travel to Baltimore tomorrow to give a speech before the local Chamber of Commerce before flying to Detroit for the Republican National Convention, which begins on Monday. Mr. Shaw is expected to be nominated on the first ballot --"

"Jesus motherfucking Christ! Son of a bitch!" Dana spun around, startled, to see that Mulder had jumped from the couch, and was now pacing in fast, furious circles. Katherine stood to one side, her eyes big and round. "I do not believe this. I simply fucking do not believe this." He turned to Dana again, and snapped, "Try another channel!"

Dana turned to comply, and she heard Katherine speaking. "Mulder? What the hell?"

Click. Another studio set, another news team, more newsreel footage of Senator Shaw and his entourage, and Mulder launched into a fresh stream of expletives.

"Mulder!" Dana turned again, to see that her older self now stood in Mulder's path, her hands gripping his shoulders. "Just stop for a minute and tell me what's going on!"

Mulder gestured at the television. "Weren't you paying attention? Didn't you see?"

Katherine looked puzzled, and then she shrugged. "Just a news story about some politician. What's the big deal?"

"Some politician," Mulder repeated. "Yeah, he's some politician, all right. Scully, who was elected president in 1980?"

She frowned, and said, "Ronald Rea --" And then she froze, and her eyes widened.

Mulder nodded. "That ain't the half of it. This guy Shaw, the one they were reporting on? This isn't the first time I've heard of him. There's an entire X-File devoted to him."

Dana shook her head, and wondered what an X-File was, but obviously this wasn't the moment to ask.

"An X-File?" Katherine said. "Mulder, why would there be an X-File on a U.S. Senator?"

"Because he's not a U.S. Senator, Scully," he replied.

"But we just saw --"

"Yup, we just saw," he said, cutting her off. "We just saw a man who has been dead for two years preparing to accept the nomination for president of the United States."

Katherine frowned again. "Dead? What are you talking about?"

"He's DEAD, Scully. He died in 1978. In prison." He took Katherine by the arm and led her over to the sofa, where they both sat down. Then he continued. "Shaw was an X-File, Scully, and a very dangerous one. If he becomes president, the consequences could be..." He seemed to be groping for the right word. "Monstrous. Unthinkable."

X-File. That was the second time he'd used that word. All the stuff about Shaw and the presidential nomination had gone right by her; Dana wasn't really very interested in politics. But somehow the phrase "X-File" seemed to resonate within her.

"What's an X-File?" she asked, taking a step towards the couple on the sofa.

They both looked up at her. Mulder opened his mouth as if he was about to answer, but Katherine laid a hand on his shoulder. He glanced back at her, and she shook her head slightly, then turned to look at Dana again.

"That's one of those things we'd probably better not go into," she said.

Dana stood looking at Katherine for a pair of minutes, trying to think of something to say. The other woman's argument made sense to her-- as much as anything made any sense at all in this crazy situation. But on an emotional level it just felt wrong somehow. Dana wanted to know what was going on; she needed to know. And she was rapidly discovering that being shut out by her older self was ten times worse than being shut out by someone else. It made her feel empty and hollow inside, as if she couldn't trust herself.

It was Mulder who finally broke the silence. "Actually, Scully, what's the harm in telling her?"

Katherine's head whipped around and she stared at the man sitting next to her in apparent surprise. "What's the harm?" she repeated. "Mulder, we already talked about this. The risks --"

"Yeah, yeah," he said. "The risks. We know all about the risks. We might change the course of history, everything might be different, there's no telling what the effects might be." He waved his hand at the television, still babbling on in the background. "But Scully, history has ALREADY been changed. I don't know how, and neither do you. Maybe we'll never know. But Raymond Shaw was never a U.S. Senator in the history we're familiar with, and he was certainly never a serious presidential candidate." He paused, and after a moment Katherine nodded slowly, apparently accepting at least that part of his argument.

"So something has changed," he went on. "Somehow, something

has changed, and we have got to take some action to set things right, before it's too late. And we haven't got a hell of a lot of time -- remember, Twitchell told us that the effect would be temporary. We could snap back to 1999 at any moment."

Dana's eyes widened slightly. Another piece of information to add to her meager store.

Now Katherine was speaking. "But Mulder, we have no way of knowing that. Yes, Professor Twitchell told us that his equipment created a temporary field effect, and that when the field had weakened sufficiently the subject would return to the present, but we didn't exactly use it in the way he intended. There was the firefight, and then the explosion. For all we know, we're trapped here permanently."

"That's true," Mulder conceded. "And if all that was at stake was our chance to get home, we'd have to plan on that basis." He put a hand on Katherine's shoulder, and leaned a little closer. "But Scully, we don't have that luxury." He nodded towards the television. "Whatever happened to put Shaw where he is has taken that out of our hands. We HAVE to stop him from becoming president, and we have to do it fast, because any minute now we might find ourselves back where we came from, and the opportunity would be lost forever. And we can't allow that to happen."

Katherine looked at him for a long moment, apparently studying his face. Finally, she said, "Mulder, what's going on? Who is Raymond Shaw, and why is this so important?" She suddenly seemed to remember Dana's presence, and looked over at her. "Dana... maybe you'd better leave us alone for a moment."

Dana was about to protest, but Mulder did it for her. "No," he said, and Katherine looked back at him in surprise. "If what I fear is true, it affects every person on this planet, and she deserves to hear it, too." His face softened and he inclined his head slightly, and for just an instant Dana thought he was going to kiss her older self. But then the moment passed, and when he spoke again his tone was very low. "She's you, Scully. We can trust her. She's not going to blow up on us, and she might be able to give us information that we need." His lips quirked slightly. "She's you, and if we can't trust you, who can we trust? Isn't that why we came to her in the first place?"

Katherine looked at him in silence for a minute. Finally, she sighed and nodded. "All right," she said. "You win." And she looked over at Dana and patted the couch next to her. "Come sit with me, Dana." Her lips quirked. "You can observe the Master at work. Call it a sneak preview."

Mulder put his hand over his heart and rolled his eyes at the ceiling. "Scully, you wound me!"

"Stuff it, Mulder," Katherine said, but there was an affectionate smile on her face. She looked back at Dana and patted the sofa again. "Come on, Dana." She waited until Dana had complied, then turned back to the man next to them. "Okay, Mulder, let's have it. Tell us about Raymond Shaw."

Mulder nodded. His face took on a pensive expression for a moment, as

if he were putting his thoughts in order, and then he began to speak.

"Raymond Shaw was born in southern Missouri in the early 1930s," he said. "There was nothing remarkable about his early life, so far as anyone was ever able to discover." He paused and looked at the two women, as if to make sure they were following him. Then he went on. "In 1950 he was drafted, and sent to Korea. Again, nothing remarkable. His military service seems to have been completely routine, right up to the time he was taken prisoner."

"POW?" Katherine asked.

Mulder nodded. "That's right. His unit was among those overrun when the Chinese entered the war in December. For several months he was listed as MIA, but finally the Red Cross was notified by the North Korean government that he was a prisoner. And after the armistice he was repatriated, along with thousands of others."

Katherine glanced briefly at Dana, then looked back at Mulder. "Go on."

"For a number of years, nothing much happened that was of any interest. Shaw returned to his home town, then he went to college on the GI Bill. He landed a job in Kansas City with an insurance company, and proceeded to work his way up through the ranks. He married, started a family, joined the VFW, the whole nine yards. Mr. Middle America.

"In 1966 he got into politics, and ran for the state legislature -- and lost. In 1968 he tried again, but this time he was successful. There were a few charges about campaign finance irregularities, but no one was paying really close attention to that issue in those days, and nothing much ever came of it."

"Still sounds pretty normal, Mulder," Katherine commented.

He nodded. "It WAS normal. It was perfect. The perfect profile of an ambitious, up-and-coming young man -- and just a whiff of impropriety, so that he didn't seem too impossibly squeaky-clean. It was a very nearly perfect op."

Katherine's eyebrows rose. "He was a mole?"

Mulder nodded again. "For the Communist Chinese, under deep, deep cover. He was finally caught when he tried to run for Congress in 1972, and he wound up in Leavenworth making big ones into little ones. In 1978 he died in prison under suspicious circumstances, but no one really cared what happened to a traitor. The matter was handled as discretely as possible; no one wanted a lot of publicity about the fact that the U.S. Congress had very nearly been compromised by an enemy power. There was also Nixon's China initiative to consider; that would have been totally derailed if the details of Shaw's assignment had ever been made public."

"What was his assignment?" Katherine asked. "And how did it get to be an X-File?"

"We'll come to his assignment in a moment; that's the real

ball-buster. It got to be an X-File because Shaw wasn't just your garden-variety turncoat; he had actually been loyal when he went to Korea, so far as anyone was ever able to find out, and he didn't sell out for money, either. But while he was a POW, they --"

"They brainwashed him," Katherine said.

Mulder nodded. "That's right. They stripped his personality right down to the bone, then rebuilt it from scratch. He was totally and completely programmed, so thoroughly that even he wasn't aware of his true purpose and identity. His actions were governed by a series of trigger phrases, and that was what finally caused his undoing. He granted an interview from a Taiwanese reporter who was doing a story about the American electoral process, and somehow the reporter stumbled onto one of the trigger phrases."

"What happened?" Katherine asked.

"Shaw blew up. The trigger phrase was not one that was intended for use at that time, and without the proper environment and background, it led to a complete meltdown. He started babbling in Chinese, and the reporter had his recorder going. To make a long story short, Shaw was hospitalized, the FBI was called in, and eventually the Bureau's psychiatric specialists were able to peel him like an onion. They got everything: What had happened to him, who had done it, what the plan was." Mulder closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them again. "And god help us all if THIS Raymond Shaw has the same programming that one did."

Dana felt a shiver of fear as Mulder's story started to sink in. A traitor. In the White House. A programmed traitor. But programmed for what?

Katherine spoke again, her voice very soft. "Mulder." She paused, almost as if she was afraid of the words she was about to say. "What was the nature of this...programming?"

Mulder's reply was equally soft. "He was supposed to start a war. Between the Russians and us."

#

July 12, 1980, 12:36 a.m.

Dana and Katherine sat at the kitchen table, drinking hot chocolate and coffee, respectively. Mulder was finally asleep, but he had not gone peacefully. Only Katherine's insistence that he had to rest, or he would be no good to anyone, had finally persuaded him.

Dana's mind was a whirl of conflicting thoughts and emotions, and although Katherine had suggested that perhaps she should go to bed, as well, Dana had not been able to face the idea of closing her eyes with so much unresolved. She also suspected that if she did go to sleep, Katherine and Mulder would be gone when she woke up.

And so they sat, drinking hot cocoa and coffee, and after awhile, spontaneously, without any prompting, Katherine started to talk. About the X-Files.

Dana sat quietly, listening to the other woman's words as they came spilling out. It was by turns frightening and hilarious, breathtaking and solemn, tender and sad. And through it all wove the tale of two people drawing ever closer to each other, but never quite touching, never quite ready to reach out for what both of them wanted.

It made Dana want to cry, but she wasn't sure for whom. For Mulder? For Katherine?

For herself?

Katherine must have noticed a change in Dana's expression, for she broke off her story in mid-sentence.

"Dana?" she said. "You okay?"

Dana looked across the table at Katherine, and saw with surprise that her older self seemed to be on the verge of tears as well.

"I'm fine, Katherine," she said. "Really. You can...you can go ahead. I want to hear the rest of it."

Katherine shook her head. "There really isn't much left to tell," she said. "Oh, I could fill in a few more details, but I think you have the essentials." She hesitated for a moment, then reached out and touched Dana's hand gently. "But Dana, there's something important you have to understand: None of this is predestined; it doesn't have to be this way...for you."

Dana raised her eyebrows. "What do you mean? How can it not be? You're me. Aren't you?"

Katherine nodded. "Yes. Yes, I am you, in most respects. But in other ways I am not." She waved her hand in the air. "This...this never happened to me. I never met my older self, and I never met Mulder until that day I walked into his office in 1992. And of course there's Shaw...." Her voice trailed off, and for a moment her face took on a troubled expression, but then her features firmed up again. "What I'm trying to say is that you can take control of your life. You can decide for yourself what you want to do and who you want to be. Don't let yourself get caught up in anything against your will."

Dana looked at Katherine for a long moment, turning over her older self's words in her mind. Finally, she nodded. "I think that makes sense. And you've given me a lot of information, given me a lot to think about, and I really appreciate it, more than you can possibly imagine." She wet her lips, then added, "But I still have one question."

"What is it?" Katherine asked.

"Do you have any regrets?"

Katherine looked at her for just a moment, then gave a sad smile and shook her head. "Mulder asked me that once," she said. "And I'll tell you now what I told him then: Even if I could, I wouldn't change a single day."

"Then it's all been worth it?"

The other woman nodded. "Yes. Despite all the pain, and the fear, and the uncertainty -- it's all been worth it. I wouldn't have missed it for the world."

Dana hesitated, but she knew she had to ask. She had to know. "Katherine...what about...you know. The other."

Her older self stared at her for a long moment, and as had happened before Dana thought she saw the briefest flicker of pain in the other woman's eyes. Finally, Katherine said, very softly, "I don't know, Dana. I really don't know. Sometimes just having what we have seems so right, more than anyone can reasonably expect to have. Other times...other times I just want to reach out to him, and hold him and love him and be everything to him. But I've never been able to...to find a way to tell him."

She paused for a moment, then shook her head. "Everything's gotten so confused. I think sometimes that if I'd done it differently, back in the beginning, it might have been possible. But there's no way of knowing." She repeated it as if it were a mantra. "There's no way I'll ever know. Not now."

The two women sat silently together for several minutes. In the end, it was Dana who broke the silence. "It's getting late," she said, glancing at the clock by the refrigerator.

Katherine followed her gaze, then looked back at Dana and nodded. "You're right. Mulder and I have got to get going." She rose from her chair and took the two mugs to the sink and rinsed them out. Then she turned and headed for the door to the living room.

Dana stood up and went after her, catching up just before the older woman reached the doorway. "Katherine? What are you going to do? About Shaw?"

Katherine stopped, but did not turn to face her. After a moment, she said, "We'll do whatever is necessary."

Dana considered that for a moment, then nodded slowly. "You're going to kill him, aren't you." It wasn't really a question.

There was silence in the room for a long moment. Finally Katherine shrugged slightly, and turned to face Dana. "I don't know," she said quietly. "Neither one of us has ever killed anyone in cold blood. Before tonight, I would have said that we couldn't. Now...I don't know. The stakes are so very high." She looked away from Dana's gaze, and repeated, "We'll do whatever is necessary." And she turned and walked out of the room.

A few moments later the three of them were standing in the living room, trying not to say goodbye. Mulder had been asleep when they returned, but had awakened quickly when Katherine spoke to him.

"I wish I could go with you," Dana said. She did not even bother to ask; she knew that they would say no.

Katherine smiled, and shook her head. "Part of me wishes for that, too, Dana. But it's not your time yet. You've still got a lot of

growing up to do." She gave Dana a meaningful look. "And you've got a lot to think about." She stood looking into Dana's eyes for a pair of minutes before finally turning back to Mulder. "How about you, partner? Feeling any better?"

"A little," he admitted, then seemed to hesitate, as if he were thinking about something.

"Not a chance, Mulder," Katherine said. "No fucking way. You are not ditching me this time. Whatever has to be done, we do it together. Got it?"

Mulder smiled down at her. "You know me far too well, Agent Scully." He briefly caressed her cheek. "Together then." Then he placed his hand on the small of her back and guided her to the door, and a moment later they were gone.

Several hours later the news started to spread across the country, blasting from televisions and radios, sending news vendors into the streets hawking extra editions. Presidential candidate Raymond Shaw had died when a car loaded with high explosives rammed into his limousine. The two apparent assassins, a man and a woman, had also died in the blast, their bodies burned beyond all recognition.

#

FBI Headquarters, Washington, DC
>March 6, 1992<p>

Special Agent Dana Scully arrived at Section Chief Blevins' office and knocked lightly on the door. His voice called out for her to enter, and she pushed the door open and stepped inside.

She found herself facing not just Blevins, but two other men as well, neither of whom she had ever met before. One, seated next to the Section Chief's desk, was silver-haired and wore wire-rimmed glasses. The other leaned casually against a filing cabinet next to a bookcase, smoking a cigarette. As she walked over to stand in front of Blevins' desk, she gave the smoker a second look, and realized who it had to be.

Blevins greeted her, and the meeting proceeded from there, pretty much as Katherine had described it to her almost a dozen years before. For the moment Dana stuck to the script, as she had done so carefully for so many years. But in a few minutes that was going to change, and she would finally be free.

Blevins was blathering on, asking her about her educational background, her reasons for joining the FBI, on and on and on. Nothing he couldn't have learned from her personnel jacket, which he clearly had sitting on his desk in front of him.

Cancer man was looking at her again, and Dana fought to keep the smirk off her lips. I've got your number, buddy, >> she thought. Things are not going to go quite the way you planned this time. >>

She turned her attention back to Blevins, who now was asking her if she was familiar with an Agent Fox Mulder, and again she followed the script, allowing Blevins to explain to her about the X-Files, and then to explain the role she would be expected to play.

Finally the interview was over, and Dana was excused. A few moments later, she stepped off the elevator into a basement hallway. The walls were lined with shelving, and there seemed to be boxes everywhere-- excess files, she supposed, materials which wouldn't fit in their proper location, but which someone felt were too important to be thrown away.

She walked rapidly down the corridor, and stopped in front of the door at the end of the hallway. The nameplate next to the door announced that this was the office of Special Agent Fox Mulder. Dana took a deep breath. This is it, >> she thought, and reached out and draped lightly on the door.

His voice floated out to her, faintly sarcastic, but with a hint of... something else, too. "Sorry, nobody down here but the FBI's most unwanted."

She took that as an invitation to enter, and pushed the door open and stepped across the threshold. She paused for a moment, and let her gaze drift across the room. The place was incredibly cluttered, with files, papers and assorted knickknacks piled three and four deep on every available flat surface. The walls were covered with photographs, newspaper clippings, and who-knew-what, and on one wall was a large poster with a picture of a U.F.O. on it and a caption reading, "I want to believe".

Dana smiled. It was just as she had imagined it from Katherine's description.

And there he was. For just a moment it took her breath away, finally seeing him again. It had been so long. He was seated at the room's only desk, his back to the door, bent over a light board to examine a set of slides. As she stood looking at him, he turned to face her, a slightly insolent look on his face, but still she couldn't help smiling.

He opened his mouth as if to speak, but she stepped forward and forestalled him. "Agent Mulder? I'm Dana Scully. Are you willing to consider an extreme possibility?"
>

Fini

End
file.